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### Introduction

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## **Introduction: Whose Civility?<sup>1</sup>**

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**Key words: Civility, dignity, respect, protest, inequality, violence**

What price civility? The populist successes of the early twenty-first century – from Trump in America to Brexit in Britain, from Duterte in the Philippines, to Orban in Hungary – have also often been marked by angry disrespect and insult. Women, immigrants, Muslims, and the disabled, (as well as bankers and the ‘global elite’) have all be the target of deliberate disdain, discourtesy, mockery and invective. As we reassess what these populist movements and any response to them might mean for our lives, there are widespread calls for increased decorum and respect in public life - for us to put our difference to one side and to all try and get along. Commentators on the right and the left have been calling for greater civility.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, civility has an uneasy history. There is a long tradition of using civility to silence dissent, excluding people and issues from public discussions. Promoting civility can close down debates, often recasting disagreement in terms of etiquette and manners, silencing heterodox views and draining disputes of passion and agonism (Connelly 1999). And civility can also promote particular white, male, middle class ways of being in the world. Civility from this perspective is a conservative favouring of the status quo, standing opposed to all forms of dissent, rebellion and revolution and in doing so forecloses radical change.

But civility is not always restraining and conservative. In the mid-1960s, the American civil rights movement promoted civility as a direct challenge to racism. In Selma, Alabama, Martin Luther King and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference used “civil disobedience” in order to expose and undermine the racial supremacism embedded in daily life and supported by the policies of the US state. By engaging in self-limiting forms of civil protest, one of the key aims of the Selma march was to demonstrate the African-American community’s distinctive and specific capacity for civility - rooted in Christianity rather than the dominant liberal notions of individual rights and the rule of law (Garrow 1986). African-American forms of civility

deployed across the south was a form of political protest that sought to call the US state back to its own claims of civilization and to hold white citizens accountable. This type of nonviolent civility tried to use the moral power of restraint and respect in order to bring about radical change across political and civil society.

Crucially, civility has also been the basis of political claims amongst marginalized groups outside Europe and North America. In India, for example, Dalit political activists use idioms of civility to challenge caste-based hierarchies and introduce new grammars of democratic politics (Waghmore 2013). Surykant Waghmore describes how Dalit struggles focus on challenging Dalit exclusions from public spaces and public life as well as generating places within which Dalit lives will be accorded dignity and respect, that continue to be violated in other terrains of public life. On Waghmore's account, these "heterotopic" places represent a profound challenge to the self-image that Indian civil and political society has used to construe itself as a modern democracy. If the radicalism of the civil rights movement sought to hold the state to its own self-image, Dalit civility seeks to fundamentally transform the way Indian state and society understands itself.

Perhaps most importantly, it is not only that the marginalised have tried to use civility as a form of protest. *Incivility* also matters, particularly to the stigmatized. Everyday life for racial and other minorities group across North America and Europe as well as the Global South, often includes countless overt and covert acts of incivility. Indeed, one of the reasons why the election of Trump and its aftermath was felt to be so problematic was because of the ways in which it has directly and indirectly promoted a particular form of incivility towards people of colour, women, Muslims, Mexicans, disabled people and many others. Sue, Capodilupo *et al.*, have used the phrase, "racial micro-aggressions," to describe the everyday forms of racism: "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of colour because they belong to a racial minority group... (that) are unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones" (2007). As Sue, Capodilupo *et al* explain, most white Americans view themselves as good decent people and find it difficult to understand that they, too, engage in unstated practices of 'incivility', which are central to buttressing racist regimes in the US and elsewhere. As one of the authors of this introduction has experienced, whenever friends from minority communities come

together (in the absence of white Americans and Europeans), they will often share and discuss experiences of micro-aggressions. Experiences of disrespect and humiliation in public life disproportionately fall upon minority and marginalized groups, which is why a concern with civility is not only restricted to dominant groups but can also be part of the bitter, sometimes humorous, angry, resigned and everyday commentary by marginalized communities on their everyday experiences.

What might anthropologists have to say about civility? The dominant (liberal) theoretical approaches to civility have widely associated it with respect and restraint in the face of difference, rooted in the emergence and development of bourgeoisie urban cultures of post-Enlightenment Europe (Sennett 1975; Shils 1992). The history of civility is therefore intimately tied up with class and race privilege. In this context, anthropologists have often been highly suspicious of claims of civility - pointing to their role in the production of inequality and the legitimization of violence, amongst other things. For example, James Holston argues that civility is not “inherently incompatible” with “coercion, violence, or religious intolerance” (2011, 55). For Holston, the distribution of citizenship rights through standards of civility disguises profound socio-economic inequality as products of moral worth and aspiration. Holston points thus to the potentially deeply conservative, even reactionary aspects of civility. However, Holston’s argument also makes it clear how and why anthropologists should continue to pay close theoretical attention to civility. He proposes that we understand civility as a series of learned dispositions “inscribed in routines of bodily actions and verbal expressions ... that permit citizens to produce the practices that confirm ... the distribution of powers consistent with a specific regime of citizenship” (2011. 55). In Holston’s account civility is a series of techniques of citizenship generated from the daily practices and experiences of public life and manifested through judgments about bodies, language and actions. Civility, as both lived experience and ideology is therefore ripe for anthropological engagement.

In this introduction and special issue, we understand civility as a range of practices and norms aimed at promoting restraint and respect in the face of difference. We follow Holston’s suggestion in seeing civility as a series of moral injunctions, with multiple

histories linked to specific experiences of colonialism and bourgeois life. In its ties to the histories of colonial domination and class privilege, civility has multiple faces, invoking respect and restraint, but also, often at the same time, implying a stifling conservatism that can be used to prevent opposition and exclude the marginal and disenfranchised. We do not begin though by assuming that civility is a good thing or not. We should also not assume that all people at all times valorize civility. In some cases, both the powerful and the disenfranchised will reject civility (Zerubavel 2002) - think of Trump again. Nor do we want to come up with a more refined and precise definition of civility. Instead, we seek to use civility as a theoretical provocation that allows us to reexamine the implications of attempts to deal with and live amongst difference in all its multiple forms. We ask: under what conditions and in what forms does civility become a powerful political and moral claim? What are the histories that mark the ways in which people are civil or uncivil to one another? When does civility move from being conformist to dissenting, and what are its limits? Or to put these questions another way, is civility a fundamentally elite project, that, at its best, papers over and further entrenches coercion, inequality and discrimination, and, at its worst, actively creates differentiated forms of recognition, selfhood and political subjectivity and humanity (in its extension as “civilization”)?

We propose to understand civility as a “worldly concept”. We mean this in two senses. Firstly, as evidenced in our discussion above, it is a concept that has traction in the world: a concern with civility and incivility can be found equally in public debate as in academic work. In Koselleck’s terms, it is a concept with “semantic carrying capacity” that “extend(s) further than the ‘mere’ words employed in the politico-social domain” (2004, 76). It is often a word we find utilized as “a weapon” with a “polemical thrust” which in its utilization linguistically constitutes a statement about the past, forms of change and possible (utopian/dystopian) futurity (2004, 78). In this process, civility is part of a complex of associated terms, such as citizen, civilization, civic, civil society which are, even more forcefully, concepts which both describe and order reality around them.

Secondly, civility is “worldly” in a more Arendtian sense. For Hannah Arendt, politics is about the space between people. There is no substance in a lone person that is

essentially political; it is through people acting together and in reference to one another that politics is constituted (1998, 20-78, 2005, 95). Whilst Arendt does not always acknowledge the unequal grounds upon which people come together, nonetheless, her notion of politics as a space that allows multiple persons to be present together is highly useful. Talking about civility, involves talking about how people relate to each other where they would appear to have profound differences. Civility therefore allows us to emphasize the relationships that are central to virtues, rights and obligations – and pay attention not just to questions of how one should live, but how we should live *together*.

Within anthropology, using civility as a theoretical provocation can help us to rethink the relationship between what others have called the “anthropology of suffering” and the “anthropology of the good” (Laidlaw 2016; Ortner 2016; Robbins 2013; Vankatesan 2015). The point in focusing on civility is not to side step issues of violence, in favor of a focus on more cheerful topics. Rather, it is to move beyond unhelpful distinctions between an anthropology focused on violence and suffering, and one focused on virtue and well-being. It is to take both violence and its counters seriously, and to see how they are caught up, and potentially disentangled from each other.

Civility can also help us cut through ongoing debates about the relationship between politics and ethics (Keane 2016; Laidlaw 2016). As Michael Lambek has argued, ethics is not “reducible either to power or desire” (2000). This may well be true. But at the same time, it is also important to recognize that ethical commitments are always caught up with politics and economics, amongst other things. In practice the distinction between ethics and politics can prove unhelpful, as it limits the types of question we ask, and the relationships we seek to draw. A focus on civility, once again, allows us to cut through these somewhat forced analytical separations. Claims of civility are always deeply ethical, political and economic - in the broad sense that they are implicitly or explicitly concerned with the distribution of violence and resources, the ways in which and the degree to which the social fabric is hierarchically organized, and conflicts over the meanings of virtue, obligation and consequence. Rather than focus on more abstract questions about what it means to live a good life, or how power is exercised, examining civility as a worldly object shifts attention to concrete problems which people grapple with at multiple levels: how do we actually live with others?

At a broader level, an anthropological perspective on civility allows us to move beyond the theories of civility developed in the context of Euro-American history (Elias 1994; Sennett 1975; Shils 1992). One of the major challenges in all the essays in this special issue is to understand whether civility has a normative charge more globally, and the ways in which civility should be provincialized (Chakrabarty 2000). If, for example, the *communication* of respect is central to civility (Boyd 2006), it is therefore important to understand the cultural codes through which civility is signified. What people understand to be civil (or uncivil) behavior can never be taken for granted, but is instead embedded within particular social and political histories. While liberal theories of civility and their critics have linked civility to the rise of bourgeois life in Europe and America, such notions of civility are also deeply tied up with histories of colonialism as well. In this context, the articles in this collection aim to show the limits of civility through the ways in which bodies are marked by pre-existing racial, ethnic and religious histories. we Civility is not a ready-made distinction applied to the colonized but is itself formed through the colonial encounter.

In the rest of this introduction we set out some of the key theories of civility in order to examine the ways anthropology can benefit from these debates, as well as contribute to them. Our choice of interlocutors is necessarily limited due to space, but we have particularly highlighted Edward Shils, Adam Smith, Norbert Elias and Etienne Balibar, as they help us to examine the key issue of ethics, violence and difference that are central to our discussion. The rest of this introduction is organized as follows: We begin with a discussion of the ethical charge and dilemmas associated with claims for civility, focusing on Shils and Smith, arguing that the force of civility can be found in the ways in which it stands between the instrumental and the principled or virtuous. We then move on, through a reading of the work of Norbert Elias, to examine the ways in which the state, and its political economies of violence, is central to the ways in which civility is made, remade and unmade. The next section then examines how colonialism – largely ignored by many liberal theorists of civility – has left civility as racially marked. We then turn to the relationship between similarity and difference, arguing that the tensions between the potential for a shared sociality and the reproduction of diversity,

egalitarianism and hierarchy, run through practices of civility. We end with a discussion of the work of Etienne Balibar and his account of the ways in which civility can be more than simply a conservative and reactionary concept.

### **The Value of Civility**

This section examines the ways in which theorists have understood the value of civility- as we draw a contrast between Edwards Shils (1997) and others who saw civility as “thick” substantive virtue in and of itself; and those who see civility in largely procedural terms (Boyd 2006; Calhoun 2000; Sennett 1975). We then turn to Adam Smith as a way out of the somewhat artificial distinction between the formal and substantive aspects of civility - albeit with limitations in terms of accounting for the political.

For many advocates of civility, it is a morally thick virtue that gives collective life value. Robert Boyd, for example, argues “civility is the disposition that makes political life possible because it allows those with different and conflicting views of the good to live peacefully side-by-side” (2006, 865). Civility here is more than simply passive respect or politeness, but an active and positive form of sociality. For Boyd, civility is about the communication of a deep mutual respect (Boyd 2006). Similarly, for David Hume, the virtue of civility lies precisely in the “charity” and “generosity” seen through “politeness” and “manners” (1985, 274- 280). Civility in this sense contains a sense of the public citizen, willing and able to contribute to the wider good.

For Edward Shils writing in twentieth century America, the civil public citizen is intrinsically connected to the maintenance of order (1997). More specifically, Shils coins two different but interdependent kinds of civility, “civility understood as good manners or courtesy” and “civility as the virtue of civil society”: civility as good manners involves treating others with respect; civility as a virtue involves an attitude that is a concern for the common good of society and the willingness to restrain oneself and work against antagonisms for the good of minimizing conflict and maintaining order (Shils, 1997, 339). Shils suggests that civility “restrains the exercise of power by the powerful and restrains obstruction and violence by those who do not have power but who wish to have it” (1997, 4), it affirms the very possibility of “a common good”. Shils’ approach though has its blind spots. As we examine in subsequent sections, the violence involved in



civility as the maintenance of social order is largely evacuated from his account. And Shils' analysis fails to capture the ways that civility is often not experienced as a straightforward virtue, but one marked by inauthentic deceit and hypocrisy. All too often civility can appear as a mask, hiding what we really think and feel. Indeed, the incivility of populist politics is often aimed directly at this sense of insincerity.

In contrast to Shils, who sees a substantive content to processes of civility, Cheshire Calhoun argues that civility is a procedural rather than a substantive virtue, more like law-abidingness than justice (2000, 252). From this perspective, civility does not involve adopting a political and moral critical position - but agreeing on how to deal with such issues. Civility is not an end in itself - but a means to other ends. Similarly, Richard Sennett celebrates the "mask" of civility, as it allows us to live with others in the face of difference (1975). You are not civil for the sake of it, but because it enables us live alongside other people without being too much of a burden. As John Cuddihy argues in "a regime of civility, everybody doesn't love everybody. Everybody doesn't even respect everybody. Everybody shows respect for everybody" (1978). You communicate a sense of respect for others, irrespective of whether you feel it. It is this instrumental sense of civility can lead to it to being associated with deceit. But, at the same time, in treating civility as simply about process and instrumental action, there is a danger of ignoring the ways in which, for some people, civility can also contain important values of its own – such as respect.

The work of Adam Smith offers one way for us to begin to move beyond the division between "thick" and "thin", virtuous and instrumental, understandings of civility. In particular, instead of construing "mutual sympathy" in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and "self interest" in the *Wealth of Nations* (1779) as ethically dichotomous and irreconcilable, it is possible to see Smith's account of sympathy and self-interest as mutually reinforcing forms of civility. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith provides a discussion of everyday civility that recognized people can be equally predisposed to act selfishly and sympathetically:

*How selfish soever man may be supposed there are evidently some*

*principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others...  
Nature when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original  
desire to please and an original aversion to offend his brethren...*

In Smith's account, people are encouraged to express their interests and sympathies moderately, and according to the social conventions of the day, making their own personal motives and intentions publicly legible. Such forms of civility make everyday life and interpersonal relations relatively more predictable and less "nasty, brutish and short".

For Smith then, focusing specifically on trade, civility takes place on the meeting point of self-interest and sympathy for others - combining both thick and thin commitments. In this special issue, Marsden also highlights the role that traders have had in the development of theories of civility through their ability to make civility both a moral virtue and an instrumental good. He draws on the particular example of Afghan merchants who move across complex transnational spaces, showing just enough of themselves, and holding back at the right moments. Marsden describes how, for this diaspora, civility- or more precisely diplomacy – allows them to traverse a variety of political and cultural contexts, being both cultural sensitive and commercially astute. The traders emphasize savvy, wit and cleverness, as well as cultural sensitivity, but also reflect on the implications such skills have on their moral worth. Diplomatic civility therefore traces a fine line between honorable conduct on the one hand and flexibility on the other. As such, Marsden helps us to move beyond the question of whether civility is a form of artifice to examine the role of civility in producing new forms of self-cultivation and social connection.

Adam Smith's particular take on civility can be seen in the context of a much longer conversation about the ways in which instrumental action and principle can be merged (Arendt 1998; Agamben 1998; Dewey 1939; Lambek 2010; Venkatesan 2015). However, the combination of the means and ends is an accomplishment easier to make it theory than practice. Although the instrumental and the principled are always deeply entangled, they can still exist in tension, and capturing these tensions is crucial to any theoretical account of civility. As Tobias Kelly shows in his contributions to this collection, the social energy of civility can come precisely in the spaces where the

pragmatic and the virtuous come together and stand apart. Kelly, focusing on British pacifists in the Second World War, argues that it is the very tension between means and ends that gives claims of civility their potency. He describes how these pacifists tried to show that living peacefully in the midst of war, was not simply a statement of principle (an end), but could also serve as a practical model for a life without violence (a means). Many of these pacifists turned to community farms in particular as an alternative to a society mobilized for war. Yet, at the same time, they often lacked the skills necessary for agricultural work, and, above all, could behave towards one another in a deeply uncivil manner- constantly quarreling and falling out over seemingly trivial issues. The merger of pacifist means and ends was a constant struggle. However, for many British pacifists living at peace was important because of, not despite, the space between their aspiration for respect and love, and the disappointments of experience. More generally then, we can see gaps between practicality and principle that seem to mark claims of civility as a challenge rather than a failing.

In the above discussion of the value of civility, politics has largely been left out of the picture. There is little sense in Shils' or Smith's accounts, for example, of the ways in which claims of civility are caught up in a political economy of violence and histories of privilege (Keane 2003). In the liberal vision, civility is a space where free individuals come together in a space of equality. In this historiography, the civil sphere is a post-feudal space, where citizens can interact with each other in equal terms, without the marks of status differentiation (Boyd 2006). Yet, civility is never neutral, and is instead always rooted in political struggles. Above all, civility has acted, like concepts of "the public", as a restricted, and exclusionary way of differentiating who was a citizen and who a subject (to use Mamdani's (1996) words). Lisa Mitchell's essay in this special issue devotes special attention to redirecting our gaze away from civility as individual speech and comportment, and towards the ways in which civility can be understood in relation to collective actions in public. Drawing upon collective actions in India, Mitchell suggests that we pay attention to the many collective repertoires by which people attempt to make themselves listened to, frequently by the state, and the ways in which particular actors and communities are rendered noise, as those whose voices cannot be heard. What

is significant is not distinct elite and subaltern forms of distinction but how those are incorporated into the state's responsiveness to forms of claim-making. Political recognition, Mitchell suggests, is central to civility. Rather than violence being the product of the incivility of the "masses", violence when it emerges in collective gatherings, can be the direct result of an unresponsive state, that does not afford recognition to some of its citizens and often aggressively silences them. It is to broader questions of violence and exclusion – and their relations with (in)civility that this introduction will now turn, first through a close reading of the work of Norbert Elias, and then through an examination of the colonial history of civility.

### **Violence and Civility**

Whilst civility might be about respect and restraint, it is important not to ignore its relationship to structures of violence and coercion. Norbert Elias provides perhaps the most sustained analysis of the relationship between civility, the state and violence, and any attempt to understand these questions must pay close attention to his arguments. In summarizing Elias' interpretation, we are not claiming it is persuasive as a socio-historical account, but rather that it opens up questions about the ways in which the monopolization of violence by the state and the growth of particular forms of self-restraint were mutually reinforcing. Crucially, Elias's concern with civility was rooted in his own experience of the twentieth century. Elias described himself as a member of the German-Jewish generation whose scholarly writings were rooted in the collapse of the Weimar Republic and spread of anti-Semitism and the triumph of Nazism and the systematic extermination of millions of Jews (among them Elias's mother) and non-Jews across Europe. Elias' two most important books on the subject, *The Civilizing Process* (1994) and *The Germans* (1997), explores what he sees as the "civilizational" and "decivilizational" tendencies that surfaced in France and in the German princely states from the sixteenth century onward, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias traces the decline of violence and the emergence of "civility" across France to the "courtization" of medieval life. Sixteenth century France, according to Elias, had one of the most developed states in Western Europe; the king had his own standing army and was no longer dependent on knights and other

warrior groups to defend the kingdom from external and internal enemies. The monarch and aristocracy disarmed and pacified these fighters by inviting them to become members of court society. As they interacted in court society, these warriors realized that the only way of acquiring social prestige, political power and economic wealth was to exchange their swords and body armor for modern weaponry: powdered wigs, embroidered tunics, sumptuous banquets, court balls and intrigue. French court society provided a place to mingle and resolve differences peacefully. These everyday interactions spilled over and became embedded across urban and rural life, contributing to the spread of social order and political stability throughout the kingdom and to the development of a state that monopolized violence. The pacification of daily life encouraged artisans, merchants, peasants, churchmen and other groups to interact, and as they did so they became increasingly “interdependent”, generating a vast and complex series of networks throughout France. Each person in each network became attuned to and was compelled to adjust their behavior in relation to those around them, predisposing all of them to exercise self-restraint.

In contrast, for Elias, Prussian court society, like the kingdom itself, remained fragmented and exclusionary: local aristocrats forbade commoners from joining it. Unlike the members of French court society, Prussia’s nobility and commoners were deeply divided, making it impossible for them to mingle and acquire the social and political skills to organize, like their French counterparts, a centralized state and curb interpersonal violence in daily life. For Elias, there was a direct link between these processes and the shape that nazism took. According to Elias, Germans, in contrast to the French, had failed to develop a centralized state and to exercise “self-restraint,” leading the Germans to forge a “culture of violence”.

It is possible to argue with some of Elias’ historical claims about France and Germany. However, the first great theoretical benefit of his account is the way he plays close attention to the state and coercion as the grounds upon which civility is made. For Elias, civility is reproduced in a context where violence has been radically reorganized, monopolized by the state and placed quite literally out of sight. But at the same time, it is important to remember, that the military can be sent back onto the street at any moment. Civility does not see the eradication of violence, but its reorganization, with the

state playing a crucially important role.

It is not just that the state sets the conditions of civility, but the absence of the state – or at least supporting political structures – can, under some conditions, make civility hard to achieve. Paul Anderson argues in this volume, for example, for the middle classes of pre-war Syria, for example, the absence of suitable political structures meant they were unable to live the civil lives to which they aspired. Civility is not simply an issue of face to face encounters, but also of the wider political and economic structures that make (in)civility possible. For the Syrians described by Anderson in this collection, talking just before the outbreak of the civil war, the ‘disorder’ of the Syrian state prevented them from enacting their own sense of dignity. Litter and the constant use of car horns, for example, are linked by his informants to a generalized and chronic state of political corruption. As Anderson shows therefore, the manners, forms of courtesy and etiquette of civility are seen as being closely tied to forms of governance. Civility is not just about the mutual recognition of worth, but also the conditions of action. The two senses of ‘civil’ (as public participation, and as polite and courteous) are therefore brought directly together- but importantly this is felt most keenly in their relative absence, rather than their presence. Such an analysis is a useful reminder that for all the potential conservatism of civility, it can be sorely missed when it is not there.

The second important thing to take from Elias’ account is his focus on status differentiation. Elias notes a particular tension where forms of “correct social conduct” are instituted as universally desirable, and yet dominant groups struggle simultaneously to mark them as signs of prestige and distinction that elevate those who practice them (1994, 384-386). Elias’ description echoes Bourdieu’s work on “distinction” (1979) in its stress on the ways in which class habits and attitudes are lived through largely implicit ideas around taste. In this collection, Helene Risor shows how a civil form of victimhood has become a quintessential indicator for “proper” citizenship in Chile. In Chile’s long democratic transition, notions of friend and enemy are migrating from the political to the social, where the urban poor are increasingly criminalized, and their struggle to get by makes them unable to adhere to notions of proper conduct. In this context, if civility is a matter of communicating respect and consideration (Boyd 2006), such respect and consideration is not equally distributed. Risor describes how poor Chileans are

stigmatized through class-based notions of decorum, and increasingly seen as potential criminals who are unworthy citizens of a new democracy. Livelihood strategies, forms of dress, and housing can all place the urban poor outside the boundaries of bourgeois civility.

Crucially, in the making of distinction of status, judgments about bodies are central. Elias brilliantly captures the ways in which concerns about defecation, procreation and eating have an important role in the ways in which claims of civility have played out. But at the same time, Elias' sensitivity to the bodies of civility, also points to a clear blind spot in his work: colonialism. In the colonial encounter, affective judgments about racialised bodies have had a crucial significance in the making of the distinctions of civility. Elias' account is very much rooted in the narrow domestic history of Europe, largely ignoring the ways in which colonialism has shaped the meanings and implications of civility within and beyond this particular space. In Elias' analysis there is an implicit assumption that anyone – so long as they exercise sufficient self-mastery and overcome class prejudice can master civility. But in the colonial context bodies can already come marked by racialised forms of prejudice, and therefore be *a priori* excluded, marking the hard limits to civility.

### **Colonial Civility**

Colonialism is central to civility. George Orwell (1937), for example, pointed out that European civility was shaped through colonial expansion, as well as the regulation of the white working class at home. Indeed, the Indian Empire was extremely attractive for relatively less privileged members of the English Middle Classes as, “the people who went there as soldiers and officials did not go there to make money; they went there because in India, with cheap horses, free shooting, and hordes of black servants, it was so easy to play at being a gentleman” (1937,63). Equally importantly, the concepts of barbarism and savagery that underlay notions of civilization are deeply entangled with colonial imaginaries (Kiernan 1995, 154). Said (1978) and Grosrichard (1998) among others, have shown that for many European thinkers visions of ideal political orders were informed by a constantly fantasized image of the “Oriental despot”, characterized by the lack of control over sensual pleasures of the body and excessive unchecked power. In

other words, the antithesis of European civility. Claims of civility were therefore both used to justify and were produced through colonialism

As such, rather than a category transplanted onto the colonial relations, the actual cultivation of European civility was a project that unfolded itself through colonial expansion, both in Europe and the colonies simultaneously. European civility always had a colonial supplement, as Bhabha argues (1994, 95). Savagery itself was ranked and differentiated, for example, India was seen as the place of unending stagnating culture, while African slaves and African colonies were seen as the anti-thesis of civilization. As Catherine Hall points out “The right to colonial rule was built upon the gap between metropole and colony: civilization here, barbarism/savagery there” (2002, 10). European forms of civility cannot be understood without what they were being framed against, from the eighteenth and nineteenth century onwards through colonial missions – first a set of assumptions around “savagery” as forms of different styles of living, which then solidified into a nineteenth century biological racism where differences were fixed immutably in hierarchically organised bodies (Goldberg 2009, Hall 2002, Hansen 2012).

In this context, the consistent denial of representative government in the colonies, and the violent forms of the colonial state that always undergirded European rule (Hansen and Stepputat 2001) - made practices and understandings of civility explicitly white. The classic substance of nineteenth century western civility, an associational life of free men allowing dissenting voices to freely debate is, in the colonies, Bhabha argues, “confronted with an aporia out of which emerges, in a figure of repetition, the uncanny double of democracy itself” (1994, 95). The forms of civility that appeared in the colonies were thus clearly marked through the distinction of whiteness, in which whiteness had to be made substantive through performative domestic and public spaces which differentiated settlers from natives. In the colonial context therefore, but also more broadly, particular bodies and people have always already been marked prior to any actual public participation as uncivil or incapable of civility.

However, having clearly asserted the relationship between processes of colonial subordination and the promulgation of European notions of civility, in this collection we also make an argument that there are multiple genealogies of distinction and prestige that



underpin regional hierarchical structures, and which often come to mingle with colonial projects but are not invented by them. Elias was criticized by Jack Goody, among others, for proposing an “entirely Eurocentric” conception of civility, and for never considering whether colonial peoples had developed a similar notion and set of practices aimed at transforming “passions into interests” (2002). As the multiple contributions to this special collection point out, elite and non-elites have generated novel and heterodox forms of civility during the colonial and postcolonial era. In this collection essays examine forms of civility as a series of practices directed towards the consolidation of the colonial and postcolonial state and/or as a series of practices of self-making and community making in plural worlds. Essays also stress that there are multiple historical traditions of authority and rule that emphasize the capacity to restrain and train one’s body and emotion as a political idiom, which actors draw from and struggle with. The attractions of civility for many might lie in its promise of mutual recognition. But at the same time, relatively egalitarian dimensions of civility can co-exist with more hierarchical traditions. It is to the implications of this tension that we shall now turn.

### **Difference, Mutuality and Emancipation**

At one level, difference is built into civility - we are civil to those who might be different from us, or hold different views. But, civility is not exclusively about difference. As Adam Smith saw it, for example, a sense of mutuality was at the heart of civility. The stranger of civility is not necessarily absolutely strange, radically different. Civil disobedience, for one, assumes a certain level of mutual sympathy, or at least the possibility of mutual sympathy. The relationship and tensions between the potential for a shared sociality and the reproduction of difference are therefore crucial to the practice of civility. In this volume, for example, Hansen examines the struggles to create forms of civility that cross over the racialized legacy of apartheid South Africa. Hansen argues that the governance of apartheid era South Africa fostered forms ethnically and racially marked civility, making it hard to develop forms civility that could cross racial boundaries. Even the anti-colonial civility of large parts of the anti-apartheid movement was based around demonstrating that people of color could master the arts of civic conduct within their own communities. In the post-Apartheid period, “the practical

meaning of civility... and other associated terms regulating public lives... are now being redefined and reinterpreted”, but the “rainbow nationalism of the ANC has so far not provided an adequate foundation for a sense of mutuality”. As Hansen has it, “the racial history remains too strong”. It is instead the claimed universality of religious community, the Pentecostal churches and ideas of Islamic fellowship that provides a space for sentiments of fellow feeling across internal and external racial and cultural differences. Yet Hansen here also points out, these universalities themselves are not free from the long histories of apartheid and the construction of racialized forms of civility. But, despite all these difficulties “the promise of a universal ethos of civility that cuts across race and class continues to be profoundly attractive to many people.”

Hromadzic’s essay in this volume stresses similar themes, showing how claims of civility in postwar Bosnia can stretch across ethnic and religious boundaries. However, at the same time, claims of civility can also reproduce distinctions based on class and the urban rural divide. The residents of towns make moral judgments about modes of living that can include Bosnian, Croat and Serb, Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox, but at the same time seek to exclude rural new comers. Claims of relative civility are a way of marking the difference between the rural and backward, and the urban as civilized. There are therefore points of solidarity and convergence that can cut through ethnic divisions, whilst creating new distinctions. Importantly, the moral force of these claims comes – perhaps counter intuitively- from the sense that it is the “rural” that is politically dominant in contemporary Bosnia. In the absence of political power, Hromadzic also shows how the material and the aesthetic is crucial to such distinctions. Hierarchies of taste are not just about bodies and behavior but also the material token of modernity, such as swimming pools and central heating systems. The aspiration to civility therefore assumes a form of mutuality, but this a mutuality with limits.

Along with Hansen and Hromadzic, Thiranagama argues in her contribution that civility is lived and experienced in “the tension between hierarchically ordered social and political realms, and the promise and movement of new egalitarian logics across those social and political realms”. Both Hromadzic and Thiranagama explore post-war situations; Thiranagama examines the situation in Sri Lanka in which the immense destruction and leveling effects of prolonged conflict has both built upon older

hierarchical structures of caste and ethnic differentiation as well as challenged them. Thiranagama takes civility as centrally concerned with the problem of how multiple differentiated but familiar communities live with each other. Thiranagama examines both intra-ethnic (internal caste differentiation with Tamils) and inter-ethnic (ethnic Tamils and ethnic Muslim) forms of civility produced in post war northern Jaffna. Her essay discusses the differentiated civility of manners that maintains dense relations of caste, and the civility of distance that newly marks ethnic relations. She argues that hierarchical forms of caste and class within Tamil and Muslim society have been challenged by the kinds of egalitarian leveling effects of ethnic mobilization and solidarity. Yet, at the same time, the promise of egalitarian sociality emerges from within already deeply hierarchical worlds. And, as Thiranagama reflects, the promise of ethnic solidarity and civility is also based on brutal histories of violence. Her essay therefore focuses on what she calls “hierarchically segmented forms of civility”. She suggests that civility should be seen as evolving project that appears different when viewed from different social locations, and can therefore contain both hierarchical and egalitarian logics at the same time.

In its links to mutuality, civility is often associated with respect and dignity, and it is these aspects that, in particular, can be a major object of struggle for the marginalized. In the last two hundred years we have seen movements from the Self-Respect Movement in South India (Hodges 2005, Geetha and Rajadurai 1993) - to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, in which the idea of dignity and equal respect have become central to marginalized groups in the face of humiliation and disregard by others. This is seen in many of essays in this volume such as Thiranagama, Hromadzic, Mitchell, Forment, and Hansen, in which questions of recognition and respect for marginalized and subaltern communities are central.

The egalitarian idea of respect and dignity as something all humans are entitled to has become foundational in legal, political, philosophical and social discourse (e.g. Rawls 1971). Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* placed respect and dignity as a central concept within moral theory ([1785] 1996, 52-86). However, at the same time, as many theorists have discussed, respect and dignity have historically been shot through with hierarchical assumptions. Historically, to offer respect and acknowledge dignity has often been to offer deference to a social superior. In contemporary usages though, respect

and dignity are also linked to egalitarian logics: it is to accord others as of worth and value. This egalitarian usage has not superseded the hierarchical one; we still feel that in particular relationships respect has to be hierarchically ordered, students offering respect to teachers, children to adults, workers to bosses, and we feel demeaned when we are not accorded the respect incumbent upon our positions. While dignity has become less ambiguously a property that one can possess without this being necessarily acknowledged by others, respect is a quality that fundamentally concerns the relationship between people and necessarily articulates a necessary tension around hierarchical distinction within egalitarian logics.

If we return to the South Indian example of the Self-Respect movement, we can see this movement between hierarchy and egalitarianism. The caste system has been orientated around the constant production of respect and deference from lower to higher. In the Tamil language, the word respect *mariyathai* is understood simultaneously in terms of the new egalitarian insistence on dignity, but also in terms of classical word by which caste deference was offered. At the same time as elites and upper castes in contemporary Tamil Nadu lament that no one shows them respect any longer, Dalits and the so-named Other Backward Castes, assert that the showing of respect and dignity towards *them* is the central plank of transforming everyday humiliation. Therefore the *tension* between and the intermingled histories of the egalitarian and the hierarchical is central to notions of civility.

However, the struggle for an egalitarian civility is crucial for any attempt to see civility as potentially emancipatory. We therefore now turn to the work of Etienne Balibar, who has presented probably the most sustained attempt to think through civility as a progressive force. Balibar's notion of civility is idiosyncratic, difficult, but highly illuminating and significant. In particular, it enables us to take into account the ways in which civility can be exclusionary and inclusive, restraining and violent. For Balibar, civility is less about politeness and courtesy, and more about the democratic principle (2002, 30). Balibar sees two complementary political projects which civility is attached to and makes possible to integrate: projects of emancipation and projects of transformation.

Above all, Balibar's civility is about the recognition of the political status of others. The central contradiction, or even aporia, at the heart of the democratic principle is the presence, Balibar argues (following Jacques Ranciere), of those uncoun­ted marginalized communities, whose possibility of emancipation depends on presenting their "own emancipation as the criterion of general emancipation (or as that fraction which, in continuing in slavery and alienation, inevitably entails the unfreedom of all)" (2002, 6). Projects of emancipation demand that the dignity and recognition of those radically excluded are central to any imagining of democracy (2001, 2002). Projects of transformation are concerned with (the Marxian project of) transforming the structures of the world, of exerting action to fundamentally redistribute, rearrange, and remake the world. Balibar argues that a project of transformation must - as a precondition - place emancipation, dignity and recognition at their heart, especially the dignity of those who do not fit into majoritarian movements and their projects of emancipation.<sup>4</sup> Without civility, no transformation can ever become emancipation.

Balibar sees civility as arising in the context of the massive forms of violence that mark contemporary life. The problems of violence are particularly important to those on the left, Balibar remarks, who put faith in revolutionary potential, but who have to now reckon with the aftereffects of immense violence that revolutionary movements and states have inflicted. How do we evolve movements and forms of praxis that are capable of reflecting upon and facing up to violence not through a naïve non-violence but through forms of anti-violence? Thus civility, in Balibar's account, is a politics that takes democracy - with its antagonisms and struggles very seriously - but seeks to confront dominating forms of violence. Balibar's work (2015) grapples with how to make a politics that takes note of the varieties of violence within political life without ceding ground to an argument that would allow extreme forms of violence to be politically legitimate.

Laurent Gayer's contribution to this issue discusses this relationship to violence in more concrete form. Gayer's essay focuses on the practices of minoritized and/or marginalized communities in Pakistan and the ethical practices and reflexive self-understanding of men who live within and engage with these differentiated worlds of distinction, but also have to juggle this with practices of violence that protect their

communities and also thus satisfy ethical and moral imperatives that emanate from living with actually existing plural worlds. An examination of them enables Gayer to rethink Balibar's understanding of the relationship between civility and violence. Instead of focusing on institutionalized violence, Gayer studies inter-personal relations between Yaqub and his neighbors, some of whom are ethnically, politically and religiously similar to him and others not, and how they practice anti-violence in daily life. And, instead of focusing on "extreme cruelty" as does Balibar, Gayer studies the way Yaqub and his neighbors engage in low-intensity forms of violence. This double shift in perspective makes it possible for Gayer to make sense of how the residents of Karachi, a "city at war with itself," curb exclusivist identifications rooted in communalism while at the same time maintaining allegiance to their own group.

Importantly, Balibar coins two forms of civility, top down (by the action and authority of a "master") and bottom up civility (2002, 30). *Top down* civility is the civility of the civilizing mission and conservatism, which either forces people to be civil in particular ways, or only authorizes particular people to be recognized as civil. In many ways this is the civility that populism responds to with its own incivility. As Balibar discusses in multiple writings, the Hegelian understanding of the state is precisely that which stands above people and manages conflicts, antagonisms, and forces a primary identification that takes precedence over other affiliations. The state however exerts enormous amounts of violence in order to manage violence, first its modality of civility is *normalization* and secondly it multiplies violence in an attempt to maintain its legitimate monopoly over violence.

*Bottom up civility* or *emancipatory civility*, in contrast, is characterized as the force behind a civility aligned around the democratic principle, the means by which individuals and collectives, mocked and decried as mobs and multitudes, have mobilized themselves as well using the institutions of the state and public life through whatever means they can to clear a "shared space" for politics where they have "their place" (Balibar 2002, 33). The distinction between top down and bottom up civility has resonances with what Forment calls "vertical" and "horizontal" forms of civility. Forment describes how Argentinian street scavengers engage and contest with municipal officials, politicians, NGOs and waste disposal companies, reconstituting themselves as particular

types of citizen. At the same time street scavengers interact with residents, developing personal relations of cooperation- and thereby helping to decriminalize and incorporate scavengers into public life. For Forment, civility from below contributes to what he calls plebeian citizenship- an alternative vision of democratic life and urban governance outside marketized and managerialist conceptions- creating the conditions of possibility for everyday politics to resurface. Here, bottom up forms of civility transform personal uncertainty into collective experience, promoting social equality and direct representation that undermined patterns of domination and made government officials accountable. In doing so, these novel and heterodox practices pushed back against forms of structural violence.

More broadly, “bottom up” civility can be seen as the space of the civil rights movement and civil disobedience more generally. Importantly for our purposes, this is a vision of civility that runs counter to one particular vision of civility as “not being a burden” (Sennett 1975). In his influential analysis, Richard Sennett describes civility as aimed at “shielding of others from being burdened by oneself” through restraint, distance and respect (1975, 264). But there are also times when people surely want to be a burden on others. Civil disobedience wants to make civility a moral burden on the powerful.

Balibar’s notion of “bottom up” civility however is not a simplistic valorization of populism at all costs. As has been evident in the growing popularity of alt-right movements in North America and Europe, the right to incivility against others can be celebrated as leveling action against “elite civility” and identity projects. Yet, as Balibar forcefully points out, what characterizes the politics of civility is precisely an attempt to clear space for the recognition and dignity of others and fundamentally a drawing of *limits*, limits to violence and limits to incivility and humiliation. This runs absolutely counter to the celebration of varieties of leveling which have mobilized the idealization of hatred against others and the insistence of a singular identity for all, especially in the nostalgic celebration of lost whiteness in Europe and North America.

With this in mind, let us end this introduction by returning to some of the questions with which we started: What space can there be for a progressive civility in the face of inequality and violence? In a public lecture in 2000 entitled “The Multicultural Question”, Stuart Hall asks how we might think about “the unremitting struggle for a

more socially equal, racially just society” and how common lives can be built together in heterogeneous societies that acknowledge difference (2000, 6). Hall points out that traditional liberal answers are unable to understand this demand, erasing as they do the demand for particularities, while communitarian responses fix communities as if internally homogenous or as if some do not wish to hold onto associational rather than ascriptive forms of communities. The question of how we live together in our uneven, unequal world with multiple heterogeneous communities has forced us to contemplate a “*double demand for greater equality and social justice and for the recognition of difference and cultural diversity*” (2000, 10). Hall suggests a new universalism which following Ernesto Laclau he calls an “*incomplete horizon*” where by new forms of universalism can arise, not from transcending all particularities, but from within a particular that takes account of others and its own insufficiency in suturing any identity finally. Hall suggests that identities “in acknowledging their radical insufficiency...[don’t] desert what makes them particular, but ...recognize that this relativizes the degree to which they can, as it were, affirm difference” without creating new exclusions that “undermine demands for equality and justice.” (2000,11). Hall sees an ongoing struggle to affirm an open and agonistic democracy that fights against racialized and ethnicized exclusion as necessarily the “multicultural” question which seeks to reconcile and recognize the claims of both the particular and the universal.

We would argue that examining civility, in all its ambiguity, allows us to confront the key questions of how we can live together. In our actually existing world, inequality, racism, and violence are challenges that concepts of civility have to face. This does not mean hanging onto civility in its pure liberal versions, or in its caricatured meaning as only a mask for reinforcing inequality, but paying attention to civilities in their multiple historical forms - with all the traces they bear of civilizational exclusivity, hierarchical rank, deference and demeanor, *but also* of egalitarian demands of respect and dignity that mobilize new actors and gather new contestations, mobilizations and forms of political demand. Civility here too appears as an *incomplete horizon* in which forms of relating to each other in shared publics persist, even as those publics are built on such deeply unequal forms. Civility’s freighted history is part of the charge that it brings to social and



political life. And it is this complex history that give concepts of civility their irresistible energy and force in the lives of so many people.

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<sup>2</sup> "Oprah Explains her Controversial Trump Quote, Calls for Civility", *USA Today*, 14 November 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2016/11/14/oprah-explains-her-controversial-trump-tweet-calls-civility/93791238/>; "Trump Supporters are Suddenly so Concerned with Civility", *The Nation*, 29 November 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/trump-supporters-are-suddenly-so-concerned-with-civility/>; "Melania Trump Makes Please for Civility", *Guardian*, 3 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2016/nov/03/melania-trump-donald-campaign-hillary-clinton-obama-2016-election>.

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Fletcher (2005) provides a critical evaluation of his work and surveys the work of scholars who have challenged it on empirical and on conceptual grounds.

<sup>4</sup>Majoritarian emancipatory movements can and do act as a force of civility by opening spaces for politics, opening up spaces of politics. However, as Balibar acutely remarks, there are two struggles within these movements. On one hand the popular movement that conceptualize themselves as collectivities as a mass and strive towards models that try to bind together and seize power are effective and politically exciting but can also fall prey to forms of violence that attempt to singularize identities. The other side is a micro-politics of identity which stress the minoritarian, the multiple forms of difference and identities to empower struggles, but which can in turn fall prey (or is feared to fall prey to) extreme forms of de-affiliation and voluntarism, naturalizing dissolution. Each position offers itself through a criticism of the other's shortcomings. How to manage these two pressures while opening up space is what a politics of civility can strive towards.